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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 23 of General Assembly resolution 55/174 B, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its fifty-sixth session, a report on actions taken pursuant to that resolution. The report covers developments during the period 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001. Recent developments are covered in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (A/56/681-S/2001/1157).

II. Review of major humanitarian developments

2. In the period under review, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly alarming as a result of the effects of the worst drought in living memory, significant abuses of human rights, and the continuing conflict in 17 out of 28 provinces of the country. That situation has provoked a massive increase in population displacement, bringing the overall number of internally displaced in Afghanistan close to one million persons.

3. The winter of 2000/01 saw generally poor precipitation for the third consecutive year. The World Food Programme (WFP)/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) crop and food assessment of May 2001 discovered mounting evidence of emerging widespread famine conditions in the country, reflecting substantially reduced food intakes, the collapse of the purchasing power of people, distress sales of livestock, large-scale depletion of personal assets, rapidly increasing numbers of destitute people and swelling numbers of refugees and internally displaced.

4. In response to the humanitarian crisis, the assistance community focused its activities on support to Afghans in need, as much as possible in their places of origin. Despite the enormous efforts made, particularly in the Western region of the country, to reach vulnerable Afghans before they became displaced, many were forced to abandon their homes

* The late submission of the report is due to the recently changed situation in Afghanistan.

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and search for food, water and agricultural land. Those who did not leave the worst drought-hit areas were often the poorest and most vulnerable, who cannot even afford to pay for the travel.

5. The Western and Northern regions are the worst affected by both drought and ongoing conflict. The impact of successive offensives was especially noted in the provinces of Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Bamyan, as well as in selected districts of Ghowr and Badghis. Insecurity and conflict increased the number of internally displaced and seriously interfered with relief efforts.

6. Relations with the Taliban authorities have been characterized by a series of adverse developments, particularly in the period following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1333 (2000), imposing unilateral sanctions on the Taliban (for further information, see S/2001/695). A legislative act, Edict 8 of August 2000, banned Afghan female employment except in the Taliban-controlled health sector. Changes in administrative procedures, the deliberate restriction of access by humanitarian workers and rhetorical attacks on aid agencies rendered humanitarian assistance work all the more complex. Furthermore, since early 2001, arrests of humanitarian staff by Taliban forces and raids conducted by the religious police on hospitals have increased. United Nations staff and aid project managers have been increasingly subjected to coercion and abusive behaviour by the Taliban authorities. The humanitarian consequences of the increasingly difficult operating environment are a reduced ability to reach populations in need, particularly women, and the inability of the humanitarian agencies to mitigate the worst effects of drought and conflict for hundreds of thousands of people.

III. Socio-economic developments

7. The Afghan economy continues to be severely distorted and constrained by the war and political crisis. However, such sectors as the transit trade to Pakistan, quarrying and minerals extraction continue to be strong, as does military expenditure. Despite the absence of overall economic recovery, some sectors and economic interest groups are clearly prospering from the current conflict.

8. The continuation of the regional drought into 2001 represents the single most important factor influencing the Afghan economy. In contrast to the 1971 drought, there is no significant public sector response, due to a lack of official government resources and the authorities' focus on the war effort. Economically, the drought has sharply reduced rural incomes, savings and investment and necessitated a large increase in food-grain imports.

9. Although generally welcomed, the abrupt implementation of the Taliban ban on cultivation of opium poppy has removed the country's most remunerative cash crop, which has caused a major income loss both to direct cultivators, and perhaps more significantly to the migrant agricultural labourers who previously travelled to South-West and South-East Afghanistan to perform labour-intensive work on the opium crop. An estimated 480,000 workers have been deprived of earnings from poppy, and the farm-gate income foregone is estimated to be in the region of $100 million. Urgent action is required by the international community to support the rehabilitation and crop substitution efforts of the United Nations in those areas.

10. There is no large-scale investment of any significance in the country. The only significant public sector investment in 2000/01 has been the purchase of Chinese digital telephone systems for Kabul and Kandahar. The only development follows the model of an extractive economy, with minimal value-added, rapid pay-off to investment and rentals paid to the political authorities. A series of agreements between the Taliban and private investors has licensed the private extraction of marble, chromate, gold and precious stones, to be mined or quarried and taken to Pakistan for processing.

11. At the local level, the conflict has been economically devastating. The use of scorched-earth tactics to destroy local economies in 2001 repeats the pattern of violence against civilian populations in Northern and Central Afghanistan in 1999. The conflict has also discouraged investment and rehabilitation activities.

12. The Afghan currency during 2000/01 has experienced relative stability, with a moderation of currency depreciation from 2 per cent monthly to approximately half that rate. Factors responsible for the reduced rate of depreciation are thought to include hard

currency transfers required to finance the war effort and the restraint exercised by both parties to the conflict in the printing and release of Afghani currency. That currency stability has helped to moderate domestic price inflation. All major surface trade routes have remained open in 2001, and wheat has been available in major markets at hard currency prices lower than in 2000 and 1999.

13. Security Council resolution 1333 (2000) extended the sanctions initially imposed pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999), which imposed a ban on flights by Ariana Airlines and froze the assets of the Taliban. While the sanctions have had no generalized economic effects, they have seriously affected the national civil aviation sector, making it harder for the national airline, Ariana, to operate.

IV. Assistance provided by the United Nations system and its partners

A. Food aid and food security

14. Confronting its worst drought in recorded memory, Afghanistan experienced in 2000/01 a cereal deficit of 2.3 million tons, more than double the already record deficit of the previous year. Access to food was a chronic problem for a large proportion of the approximately 21.9 million Afghans. WFP provided emergency food assistance of 136,000 tons of wheat for 3.2 million drought-affected people in the period July 2000 to June 2001.

15. Key indicators of the gravity of the situation were reductions in food intake, the consumption of wild foods, the collapse of labour markets, distress sales of livestock, the depletion of productive assets and growing numbers of internally displaced families and refugees to neighbouring Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Deaths due to starvation have occurred, mainly in remote, inaccessible areas.

16. WFP developed a new distribution mechanism, Food Distribution for Asset Creation (FOODAC) for the emergency operation. Combining the aspects of free food distribution and food-for-work, FOODAC provides sufficient food for a community to cover basic needs while the community provides workers to create assets determined to be valuable by the community itself.

17. Under its regular relief and rehabilitation programme from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001, WFP provided an additional 96,000 tons of food to approximately 1.5 million vulnerable Afghans; 52 per cent of recipients were women or girls. Those activities were subsequently integrated with the emergency operation. WFP has also supported bakery projects in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif. In Kabul, 132 general bakeries and 25 women's bakeries provided heavily subsidized bread for approximately 360,000 vulnerable people daily. In Mazar-i-Sharif, 80 bakeries, 20 of which are run by women, serve 110,000 people daily.

18. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) grew substantially in many areas of the country and food assistance also increased. In total, 450,000 IDPs in urban-area camps, as well as those IDPs dispersed in rural regions, were assisted with 9,540 tons of WFP food, in addition to the food utilized under the emergency operation.

19. Food-for-work activities helped improve agricultural infrastructure and rural feeder roads. These activities increased food production and improved access to markets and health facilities. One of the largest food-for-work projects was the six-month Kabul winter relief project, which provided almost 2,000 tons of wheat for 8,000 beneficiaries. Other WFP activities included food-for-education (FFE) and food-for-seed (FFS) projects. FFE, in collaboration with UNICEF and an international NGO, provided food incentives to increase student enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls, in Badakhshan province, a food-deficit non-Taliban region where both girls and boys can attend school; 3,100 tons of food were distributed to 29,700 beneficiaries, 44 per cent of whom were female students or teachers. FFS, in partnership with FAO, aimed to stimulate food production and long-term food security by multiplying improved seed and distributing it to poor farmers. Approximately 7,650 tons of food were distributed to over 7,620 beneficiaries.

B. Health

20. United Nations agencies, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the public health authorities, have prioritized the maintenance and expansion of health services to uncovered areas with programmes to promote safe motherhood and to control major communicable diseases, including diarrhoeal diseases, respiratory infections, malaria, measles and

tuberculosis. More than 75 per cent of the health service is funded by external resources.

21. WHO, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, organized a planning workshop in Kabul to formulate strategies for health services development. In partnership with health agencies, WHO has been supporting primary health services and community-based initiatives, including a basic development needs programme, to deliver essential health care. Different categories of health-care providers have been trained in all regions of Afghanistan.

22. As part of the Expanded Programme for Immunization (EPI), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) continues to provide vaccines, supplies and financial support to the local authorities and non-governmental organizations. EPI services have expanded to new districts, with the number of health facilities providing EPI services increasing to 546 from 441 in 1999. With the increase in physical infrastructure, there has been a corresponding rise in EPI vaccinators.

23. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with local health authorities and other partners, carried out five rounds of national immunization days (NIDs) for polio eradication. More than 5 million children under age 5 received polio vaccines in each round; more than 4 million children received Vitamin A supplementation during the fall 2000 and spring 2001 NIDs. Surveillance shows that the repeated rounds appear to have had an impact. Both local and national efforts to obtain negotiated and de facto ceasefires were essential to the success of reaching every child under age 5 with oral polio vaccine.

24. UNICEF supported the renovation of provincial hospitals in Farah, Balkh and Logar provinces. Those hospitals were identified for upgrades to the comprehensive emergency obstetric care level. WHO supported the reopening of nursing schools in Kandahar and Herat, where half the students are females. UNICEF, in collaboration with other stakeholders, is promoting the Safe Motherhood Initiative (SMI) with focus on emergency obstetric care. WHO facilitated the establishment of a national maternal and child health task force, comprising national authorities, WHO, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and relevant NGOs. WHO also organized a workshop to update policy guidelines for the traditional birth attendant (TBA) programme and to standardize the TBA training curriculum. As part of SMI, WHO trained 50 female physicians and nurses/midwives in essential obstetric care; this was supplemented by the training of 36 trainers of TBAs and 580 TBAs, working in over 400 villages. WHO also provided about 1,200 kilograms of medical supplies and equipment to 12 referral hospitals and 30 maternal and child health facilities, serving 600,000 women of childbearing age and 800,000 children under 5 years of age. Under the Greater Azro Initiative, a returnee reintegration project funded by the Japanese Government, WHO carried out safe motherhood needs assessment surveys in four target areas where refugees are expected to return from Pakistan and rehabilitated three basic health centres. The centres will provide comprehensive maternal and child health-care services to the local people as well as to returnees. In the nutrition sector, WHO facilitated two micronutrient awareness training courses in Kabul and Jalalabad, supported the wheat fortification project of WFP, and trained 88 female and 94 male health personnel from six regions in community nutrition.

25. Efforts to control major epidemics concentrated this year on meningitis, which was first recognized as an epidemic in the Kandahar area and controlled through the concerted action of NGOs, WHO, UNICEF and local authorities. Also, UNICEF supported the universal salt iodization initiative, which aims to ensure that at least 50 per cent of salt available for human consumption will be iodized by the end of 2002.

26. WHO and other founding partners have launched the Roll Back Malaria initiative in Afghanistan. The country has one of the largest insecticide treated nets programmes in the world to control malaria. Targeting pregnant women and children who suffer most from the disease and through joint efforts of WHO, NGOs and local authorities, about 80,000 bed nets were distributed and 100,000 were impregnated with pesticide to prevent malaria transmission. Malaria technical committees in each region are overseeing malaria surveillance and the distribution and maintenance of the bed nets. WHO is leading the efforts to combat cutaneous leishmaniasis, which has reached epidemic proportions in many parts of Afghanistan, by provision of drugs and equipment, training national health staff and developing guidelines on treatment in local languages.

C. Water and sanitation

27. During the past 12 months, 1.4 million people in six regions, including drought-hit areas, benefited from the UNICEF Water and Environmental Sanitation Project. Over 2,500 safe drinking water points brought the water supply coverage to 540 persons per water point in the areas, and 6,200 household sanitary latrines increased coverage to 3 sanitary latrines per village. In the Northern region, a baseline survey was conducted in Balkh and Jawzjan provinces, covering all villages. In other regions, survey committees have been formed and surveys are being conducted in focus provinces. UNICEF also initiated the testing of groundwater quality in 2,500 wells within five regions to ensure the supply of safe drinking water.

28. With regards to capacity-building, hand pump mechanics, local masons and staff from the Rural Rehabilitation Department were trained in the installation and maintenance of hand pumps and the construction of sanitary wells and latrines. The Rural Rehabilitation Department was provided with 14 percussion-type local drilling machines and trained in their operation. Along with hardware interventions, hygiene education activities were undertaken widely in all regions. WHO, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, successfully implemented numerous water supply projects. In almost all provinces hygiene education and water quality analysis and control are ongoing participatory activities. Relevant experiences are being shared and exchanged through the cross-cutting water sector group. In Faizabad, WHO completed a water distribution network, in collaboration with UNICEF and WFP, which will provide safe drinking water to about 50,000 inhabitants of the city through pipelines drawn from springs located above the city. Two water distribution reservoirs were also constructed in the city. In Faizabad, with support from WFP, the World Health Organization completed a flood-protection project to protect the life and property of residents in the surroundings of the Mala Dara. In Karte-Moalimeen in Kandahar, WHO constructed 154 demonstration latrine units to suit different hydrogeological conditions.

D. Education

29. There has been no change in the Taliban position on girls' education. Girls are still officially not allowed to attend formal schools and female teachers were dismissed from government service in early 2000 during a rationalization exercise. The assistance community therefore has continued to work mostly through alternative and non-discriminatory channels of education in various regions of the country. Those efforts are at times hampered by local efforts to move girls' classes organized by NGOs, communities and individual teachers to mosques. Girls can go to school in the Northern Alliance areas; however, severe budgetary constraints curtail access there, especially in rural areas.

30. Because of the ban on girls' education in the formal sector, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and a variety of non-governmental organizations support rural community-based and urban home-based schools, reaching an estimated 500,000 girls and boys. UNICEF continues to work with local authorities in the Eastern region, providing educational materials, teacher training and technical support to over 150 community schools. In parts of the Central Highlands, material support is provided to formal schools opened to girls. In addition, various NGOs support formal primary schools, mostly in rural areas where it can be matched by support to home-based girls' classes.

31. In Badakhshan province, where girls and boys have access to formal schools, UNICEF and one international NGO continue to provide education materials and teacher training. The provision of a food ration for students and teachers in the WFP food-for-education project has resulted in increased enrolments and attendance in 49 pilot schools. The project will be evaluated in 2001.

32. Primary education for IDP children in the Kabul ex-Soviet Embassy compound was provided by UNICEF and one international non-governmental organization, and primary classes for IDP children in Takhar started with UNICEF support.

33. In order to strengthen the assistance to education in Afghanistan, UNICEF and its partners are involved in a number of inter-agency initiatives, which focus on quality improvement through training of primary school teachers in basic competencies for math and languages, and the development of supplementary materials linked to the basic competencies. A joint education management information system is being

developed to improve data collection, analysis, planning and reporting on education indicators.

34. Educational messages on health, education, safe water, sanitation, child protection and early childhood development and a variety of other development topics are disseminated by radio through the Afghan Education Drama radio project of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), supported by a number of United Nations agencies and other donors. UNICEF is further assisting the new BBC Radio Education for Afghan Children project, which went on air on 7 July 2001.

35. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continues to provide technical support for education in Afghanistan. UNESCO organized courses for training of teacher trainers, teachers, educational managers, supervisors and community mobilizers. A set of teacher education materials and classroom teaching aids was also produced and supplied to schools managed by NGOs inside Afghanistan, and in refugee camps. Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations partners and non-governmental organizations, UNESCO undertook the Education for All 2000 assessment of basic education in Afghanistan. UNESCO has also produced a resource package of eight booklets on the culture of peace in Afghan languages, and widely disseminated it to Afghan children, youth and adults.

E. Mine action

36. Afghanistan remains severely affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance. The United Nations coordinated Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA), with a workforce of some 4,800, undertakes a diverse range of activities, including mine-awareness education, technical training related to mine action, general and technical information-gathering, and clearance of areas contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance.

37. The current known area contaminated by landmines in Afghanistan is 728 square kilometres (km^2), which is spread throughout the country, much of it land that could otherwise be used for productive economic and social purposes. Of that total, 350 km^2 are assessed as being vitally important residential areas, commercial land, roads, irrigation systems and primary production land. In areas contaminated by landmines, there is an equally significant and serious problem posed by the existence of unexploded ordnance.

38. MAPA plans, manages and integrates its activities with the sectoral programmes implemented by other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. Nine Afghan NGOs and four international NGOs implement the Programme's activities. In addition, one Iranian NGO is also involved in mine-awareness training of refugees returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Field-level planning, coordination and quality control are carried out by the United Nations regional mine action centres located in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad.

39. In 2001, MAPA aims to clear up to 29 km^2 of mined area and 50.3 km^2 of former battle area, and to survey and mark 32 km^2 of minefield and 50.3 km^2 of former battle area. MAPA plans to provide mine-awareness training to 930,000 people and to provide the necessary staff training to maintain the Programme's standards and existing capacity.

40. In line with its global mandate for landmine awareness, UNICEF is working with MAPA and a landmine awareness international consultant to define a future course of action in Afghanistan. UNICEF has previously supported awareness activities through, for example, the Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Society for Technical Communication (United States) landmine education programme and social mobilizers.

F. Food and agriculture

41. Agricultural production remains the backbone of the Afghan economy and agricultural activities provide livelihoods for the majority of the Afghan population. Serious underfunding over the past several years has limited activities to support agricultural production. The tragic consequences of several years of drought have highlighted the dangers of underfunding agricultural development activities while only keeping people alive through emergency humanitarian assistance activities.

42. The Afghanistan Support Group (ASG) established an informal working group on food security composed of selected ASG members, FAO, WFP, UNDP, prominent NGOs and the World Bank, which took the lead. A draft food security strategy was

presented to an ASG meeting in Switzerland in December 2000. Virtually all ASG members endorsed the plan and indicated that, although their funding window for Afghanistan was for short-term emergency humanitarian assistance, they recognized the need to address strategic food security issues with a longer time frame.

43. UNDP, under its Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment (PEACE) initiative, is funding FAO technical expertise and activities in the crop and livestock sectors in selected districts in Afghanistan, an arrangement that is attracting considerable funds from other donors for rehabilitation activities in different areas of Afghanistan. In 2000 and 2001, the in-country cereal seed production programme received funding which enabled FAO, in active collaboration with WFP and NGOs, to produce and distribute more than 8,000 tons of high-quality seed. The livestock part of the integrated FAO programme is receiving FAO technical cooperation programme resources for the control of transboundary animal diseases and drought mitigation activities for livestock-owning Afghans.

G. Rural and urban rehabilitation

44. The UNDP Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment programme has poverty alleviation and community empowerment as explicit programme goals, with subsidiary objectives relating to food security and access to social services and livelihood opportunities. Special attention is paid to the affirmation of women's rights, providing assistance to the very poor and marginalized groups, environmental degradation and the sustainability of programme outcomes and community mobilization.

45. The first phase of the PEACE programme ended in December 2000. PEACE II, started in January 2001, still focuses on strengthening the approximately 2,100 community-based organizations and interest groups established under the first phase but also aims to improve management and coordination, broaden partnership with other United Nations agencies and NGOs, and improve the selection of geographical areas and beneficiaries.

46. In addition to strengthening partnerships between UNDP, UNOPS, FAO and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the next phase of the programme will also entail partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Both agencies have agreed to share responsibility for the strategic direction and management of the programme, including resource mobilization. Strategic partnership entails an agreement between the partner agency and UNDP to cooperate closely in PEACE-designated areas by pooling resources and programmes under unified management.

H. Voluntary repatriation

47. Afghan refugees remain one of the largest and longest-standing refugee caseloads in the world, with over 4 million persons in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran alone. Afghans are still fleeing their country, driven by fear of persecution, conflict, unrelenting poverty and the effects of the worst drought in living memory. While the majority of Afghans seek access to safety in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the number of Afghan asylum-seekers and refugees beyond neighbouring countries has dramatically increased in recent years. In 2000, Afghans applied for asylum in at least 68 countries worldwide. In Europe, in particular, the numbers of new arriving Afghans has almost doubled in the past two years.

48. Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to host majority of Afghan refugees. The fading climate of hospitality and asylum fatigue in those countries are among the reasons for the increase of Afghans arriving in countries beyond the neighbouring States. Since the beginning of 2001, regular patterns of forcible returns have been observed from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. In both countries, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been negotiating on appropriate screening mechanisms with the respective Governments to enable access to protection and assistance by those in real need.

49. Despite the deepening crisis in Afghanistan, a large number of Afghans, often after 15 to 20 years in exile, continued to return voluntarily in 2000 to their home country. Through organized movements, UNHCR and its partners helped some 210,000 Afghans to repatriate. Of those, 133,000 returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran under a joint programme agreed between the Government of the Islamic Republic of

Iran and UNHCR, implemented jointly with the Intergovernmental Organization for Migration (IOM), and 76,000 returned from Pakistan. All the returnees were provided with a standard repatriation grant, consisting of wheat from WFP, cash and non-food items. Returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran were also provided with transport to their areas of return. In addition, shelter materials were provided to vulnerable families; potable water was provided through dug wells; microincome-generating activities were implemented; and community structures strengthened. Many more people returned spontaneously without assistance, or travelled back and forth.

50. In 2000, UNHCR and its partners did not facilitate or assist return to insecure and severely drought-affected areas. Moreover, assisted voluntary repatriation to the Southern part of the country, where water shortages were most dramatic, was limited to selected districts.

51. As conditions in Afghanistan were anticipated to further deteriorate due to continuing drought and limited economic opportunities, assisted voluntary repatriation was suspended during the first half of 2001. In resuming assisted voluntary repatriation during the second half of 2001, efforts will focus on assisting return to areas of Afghanistan, where conditions are suitable and there is capacity to facilitate the re-establishment and reintegration of returnees.

52. UNHCR continued to monitor the situation of returnees at their places of origin and return by systematically conducting interviews with heads of returnee families; this is done with a view to identifying the basic needs of returnees and raising the awareness of local authorities and returnees about their rights, in particular those enshrined in the general amnesty declarations adopted by the authorities in Afghanistan in 1997.

53. Information generated through returnee monitoring indicated that an increased number of returnees are motivated by difficulties encountered in countries of asylum, including economic difficulties and fear of being forcibly returned. While the overwhelming majority of the returnees were able to return to their places of origin in Afghanistan, an increased number have had difficulties establishing their livelihoods. Most return to farming and animal husbandry, but a growing number are dependent on the wage-labour market or remain without regular sources of income after return. IOM, through its return of qualified Afghan nationals project, is strengthening the qualified human resource capacities in the health, education and other social service sectors by matching potential returnees from Pakistan with jobs available in Afghanistan for which they are qualified. In cooperation with Habitat, IOM has also established in Kabul an information and return referral system for returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. The project aims to profile the returnees so as to better address their needs and potentials and to ease their reintegration into the community.

54. The basic needs of the returnees (particularly for shelter and access to potable water) remained a priority during the initial period after return. However, investment in the medium-to-longer-term livelihoods programmes is necessary for return to be a lasting solution. Efforts are being made to respond to improve health and education services to rehabilitate the agricultural sector in areas of high refugee return, and to support alternative sources of income through small-scale microcredit programmes, but those programmes lack resources.

I. Drug control

55. In 2000, opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan amounted to 82,178 hectares (ha), which represents a reduction of just under 10 per cent compared with the 1999 estimate of 90,983 ha. The severe drought, however, brought opium production down by 28 per cent, to 3,300 tons as compared to the previous year. Despite that reduction, Afghanistan still accounted for 70 per cent of global illicit opium production in 2000. Approximately 95 per cent of cultivation of illicit opium cultivation took place in areas controlled by the Taliban.

56. On 27 July 2000, the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Omar, issued a total ban on opium poppy cultivation. A preliminary assessment of the implementation of the decree undertaken by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in February 2001 indicated that the ban had been vigorously implemented. Opium poppy cultivation had almost been completely eliminated in the major poppy-growing areas of Helmand, Nangarhar, Oruzgan and Qandahar Provinces. The overall findings of the pre-assessment survey were

later confirmed by a donors' assessment mission to Afghanistan organized by UNDCP in April/May 2001.

57. The donors' assessment mission found that the opium poppy ban had resulted in additional hardship for many small farmers, particularly sharecroppers and itinerant workers. Indebtedness was very high among sharecroppers and it was observed that itinerant workers, without their main source of income, were becoming displaced, seeking refuge in major urban centres, in other countries or enlisting in the Afghan conflict. The Mission recommended, inter alia, that aid agencies with relevant mandates engage more in areas of former poppy cultivation in the short to medium term by providing subsidized agricultural inputs or implementing food/cash for work programmes.

58. As a first direct measure to address the alarming situation in the former poppy-growing areas, UNDCP was asked to prepare and implement a short-term assistance project in Nangarhar Province in Eastern Afghanistan. In the medium/long terms, it was recommended, inter alia, that a framework for sustainable development in Afghanistan be drafted as soon as political conditions permit.

59. Between March 1997 and June 2001, UNDCP implemented a four-year pilot drug control programme for Afghanistan composed of four projects, including on capacity-building for drug control, drug control monitoring systems, poppy crop reduction and drug demand reduction support. The activities of the poppy crop reduction component of the programme encompassed the rehabilitation of irrigation infrastructure, support to farmers in the production and marketing of agricultural products, and other integrated rural development interventions aimed at building sustainable non-poppy based livelihoods. Despite the fact that the programme had to be closed prematurely due to a severe funding shortfall, a decrease of 47 per cent (5,515 ha in 1998 vs. 2,939 ha in 2000) in poppy cultivation was achieved in the four target areas in the short lifetime of the programme.

60. In March 2000, the Afghan drug threat to regional security and beyond was reviewed by the Security Council. In response, the Security Council encouraged the "Six plus Two" Group to address the drug-related issues in a coordinated manner, with the support of UNDCP. UNDCP developed a regional action plan to promote coordination between Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on drug control issues at the regional level. The plan was endorsed by the "Six plus Two" Group at its meeting on 13 September 2000 in New York. The plan promotes regional cooperation among Afghanistan's neighbouring countries related to the interdiction of drug trafficking, the control of precursor chemicals used to produce drugs and the development of alternative development projects to eliminate illicit crops in Afghanistan.

J. Human rights and gender

61. Developments over the past year have again shown that the rights and well-being of the population are jeopardized by the actions of warring parties. Civilians bear the brunt of the fighting, while simultaneously being subjected to discriminatory policies and practices that undermine their ability to enjoy such basic rights as the rights to food, health, shelter, education and the means to provide for oneself and one's family. In January 2001, Taliban forces allegedly massacred approximately 130 men they had rounded up after taking Yakawlang. In addition, the Taliban authorities have imposed regulations and restrictions that hinder the work of aid agencies.

62. In Taliban-controlled areas, women and girls are subjected to officially sanctioned discrimination that greatly restricts their access to the minimal health and education facilities that are available. Women, including those who have primary responsibility for their families, have few options other than begging, given Taliban restrictions on female employment outside the home. That situation is unacceptable and points to the importance of more innovative and comprehensive approaches that take account of deeply ingrained attitudes and the dynamics which help maintain such abusive practices.

63. UNICEF, within its protection/promotion of rights programme, has been working in partnership with various agencies in seeking to directly reach over 12,000 children and women needing special protection measures in 2001. The 12,000 include disabled children and women, working and institutionalized children, and female-headed households.

64. Numerous studies have also been undertaken this year on child-protection issues, including on causes of disability in the Eastern region, children in armed conflict, an overview of children and women in Mazar-i-

Sharif, and a report for the Global Movement for Children on the situation of Afghan children. In addition, UNICEF continues with its training and awareness activities on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in six regions of Afghanistan. Over 3,000 persons have been directly trained on the Convention since mid-2000, with new areas being covered in 2001. Furthermore, UNICEF has also increased the number of Assistant Protection Officers in the field, who now total five. The Officers are supported by the Child Protection section in Islamabad and are linked to the Human Rights Consultative Group, as well as relevant regional technical working groups. UNICEF has also begun a number of protection-related activities with IDPs, including a survey of female-headed households, a psychosocial intervention and child-friendly spaces programme in Herat. Similar activities are commencing for IDPs in the North.

V. Assistance provided by Member States

65. While Member States have increased funding, prospects for recovery remain dire unless donors are prepared to rapidly meet the needs for short-term emergency assistance, especially for food and non-food items. Most importantly, in addition to funding to help cope with emergency needs, donors must be prepared to invest in longer-term interventions. This is especially crucial if currently displaced persons are to recover and drought-affected non-displaced are to be saved from further loss of assets and likelihood of displacement. In particular, the needs of farmers and labourers who have given up poppy urgently need to be met.

66. At the time of reporting, the Consolidated Appeal for Afghanistan has been funded at less than 40 per cent of the required contributions. Coordination, water and sanitation, as well as most aspects of rehabilitation and recovery of sustainable livelihoods, are seriously underfunded. Additional information on funding, including contributions by specific donors, can be found on the web site at: www.reliefweb.com.

VI. Concluding observations

67. As of mid-2001, the situation in Afghanistan had not shown any hope for peace. The fighting between the Taliban and the United Front had intensified; however, neither warring side had achieved major territorial gains. Yet, the war spread to more areas of Afghanistan, spurring further displacement and making humanitarian access even more difficult.

68. Afghanistan faces a much more serious food crisis this year than last year as a consequence of severe drought for the third consecutive year and intensifying economic problems. The food situation is rapidly deteriorating and will continue to worsen. WFP recently launched an appeal for an emergency operation to avert the threat of starvation for millions of people. WFP originally planned to help feed 3.8 million people but is now planning to target about 5.5 million people.

69. The continuation of the regional drought into 2001 has emerged as the dominating factor affecting the socio-economic situation in the medium term. Rural income, savings and investment have drastically been reduced. Afghans have seen their purchasing power seriously reduced by the lack of employment opportunities within and outside agriculture, declines in cash crop production, dwindling numbers of livestock and low livestock prices. In addition, the positive development regarding the abandonment of poppy cultivation in 2001 has at the same time imposed severe economic hardship on poppy farmers, workers and traders, as well as causing a decline in the tax receipts on poppy production of the Taliban authorities. Finally, there is growing concern about the deteriorating relationship between international relief agencies and the Taliban, which is rendering the work of those agencies increasingly difficult.

70. The combination of drought, conflict and human rights abuses, as well as the deteriorating operating environment of aid agencies, have deepened Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis during the reporting period. The overall situation is very serious; millions of people could be facing starvation, with the drought exacerbating already severe food insecurity. Given the scale and magnitude of the food crisis facing Afghanistan, there is a need for a concerted international response to avert a catastrophe. Moreover, there are huge rehabilitation and development needs and the current assistance provided meets only a small proportion of those needs.